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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

March 07, 2004

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 629 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, KPAL
Captions: None
Subject: PERCEIVED INACTION ON ROADMAP FUELS DEBATE
Ref: None

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 00629

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ACTION: POL
INFO: PAO RSO AMB DCM P/M ECON
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INFO: PAO

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3438
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000629

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/IPA, NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/14
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: Perceived inaction on Roadmap fuels debate

Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, Reasons
1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: There is a perception here among policymakers, students, journalists, and academics, that the USG no longer considers the Palestinian-Israeli issue a major priority. That perception is fuelled in recent weeks by the lack of any mention of it in the President's inaugural interview on Al Hurra and in President Bush's State of the Union address. In addition the Administration's overwhelming emphasis on Iraq, recent press reports on our consultations with the Europeans -- and not the Arabs -- about the Greater Middle East initiative, and the media frenzy over U.S. domestic politics have contributed to the

belief that the US has put this issue, so central to the region's stability, on hold. The GME and even MEPI's broad agenda for reform in the region are seen as a diversion from the unresolved Palestinian issue Arabs care most about. Daily images of parents and children attempting to scale Israel's newly-built wall and the continuing violence between the two sides is the main event in newspapers and television stations throughout the region. While we remind our interlocutors that we remain engaged on the Roadmap, all are skeptical about our commitment to implementation. The prevailing opinion is that unless the USG becomes re-engaged in the peace process, it will be difficult to make progress on other issues, such as Iraq, and mistrust of American policy will facilitate recruitment by extremist groups opposed to the United States and its allies. End summary.

Frustration at perceived U.S. inaction

12. (C) A recurring theme in political discussions, conferences, and editorials here in recent months has been the diminished role of the United States as a peace broker in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Emiratis, like Arabs elsewhere, view the U.S. through the Palestinian prism, and they question U.S. inaction given the ongoing deterioration and the controversial wall construction. "There is a great amount of frustration. People don't see any progress being made to resolve the problem," Abdullah Rashid Al Nuaimi, the UAE Foreign Ministry's assistant under secretary for political affairs, told Polchief on January 26. Many of our interlocutors were upset that President Bush's State of the Union address made no mention of the Arab-Israeli issue and that it was not raised during his interview with Al Hurra correspondent Mouwafac Harb. A young Emirati in training at the UAE's Diplomatic Institute said it was as if the West had abandoned the Palestinians. "The U.S. policy of not intervening against (Prime Minister) Sharon, or just letting Sharon (act alone right or wrong) reduces the credibility of the United States," the U.S. college graduate said. The fact that the topic was not covered during the President's exclusive interview with Al Hurra was "proof" for some of our press contacts "that the US wants to avoid the subject" and evidence that Al Hurra is not going to have any credibility because "no professional journalist reporting for the ME would have the President on his program and not cover the Palestinian/Israeli issue."

Concern at highest UAEG levels

13. (C) In meetings with the Ambassador, members of the UAEG leadership have made clear their concern over the situation in the Palestinian territories and the perception that the US has put this issue on hold until after the presidential elections. In a meeting with presidential son and director of State Security, Shaykh Hazaa bin Zayed told the Ambassador that extremists would continue to gain support in the Muslim world as long as the Palestinian/Israeli conflict remained unsettled. He argued that the region would remain unstable without its resolution because the Palestinian "cause" provided the rallying cry for those groups opposed to the US and its allies.

Other U.S. preoccupations feed resentment

14. (C) Many Arabs in the UAE believe the Arab-Israeli dispute is being relegated to a lesser priority by other U.S. preoccupations. Iraq is one of those "diversions," said Hana Zakaria, a Palestinian-born British national working as a reporter for Abu Dhabi TV. She told Polchief that unless the Palestinian

issue is resolved, "drops of blood will accumulate across the world." Others said the unresolved Palestinian issue is a kind of cancer in the region. We have been told that MEPI, and now the Greater Middle East initiative, would resonate more positively here if people could see tangible progress on the Roadmap. Instead, the "Greater Middle East" concept is being portrayed by many as a paternalistic initiative by the U.S., in consultation with NATO and the Europeans, thus reinforcing themes that the West dictates to the Arab/Muslim world. A political cartoon in the Arabic daily Al Khaleej illustrated the initiative as a U.S. whip about to swat a pesky fly.

Prescription for change: More U.S. engagement

¶15. (C) Critics of U.S. policy say we need to apply real pressure on Israel, not just what they consider "cosmetic" pressure. They see Israel's security fence as a concrete fact on-the-ground that will ensure that there is no Palestinian State. Our interlocutors believe the U.S. needs to actively encourage both sides to re-engage on the political level and thereby shore up our own credibility in the region. In a rare admission of the need for the Arabs to become more active, Omar Khalaf, deputy director of the MFA's Diplomatic Institute, said that Arabs need to play a more public role in the peace process. The idea that Arabs need to do some self-criticism was echoed by a number of others.

Warnings from Arab intellectuals

¶16. (C) In recent public lectures we have attended, a variety of diplomats and scholars have warned against ignoring the Palestinian issue. "The Palestinian issue represents for us the historic challenge. It has an impact on the GCC and the Muslim world as a whole," said Saudi Prince Turki Al Faisal at a conference of the UAE think tank Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR) in January. At the same conference, Iranian Vice President Mohammed Ali Abtahi said that U.S. military intervention in the region and the U.S. backing of Israel in its confrontation with Palestinians has pushed many Muslims to extremism. Abtahi said that the U.S. policy on Palestine has placed heavy psychological and moral pressure on Arab nations while terrorism has led to instability in the Gulf region.

¶17. (C) Nadir El Mahdy, a political science professor at Zayed University, an all-Emirati women's institution, said more dialogue will break down the mistrust that exists between Arabs and the West. When Emboffs have spoken to his "Windows on America" class, the students most often have questions about U.S. policy toward Palestinians, and the double standard in U.S. Middle East policy. At the UAE Diplomatic Institute, a number of diplomats in training were more blunt. How, they ask, can the U.S. call for democracy and reforms in Arab countries and not do the same for Israel? Emiratis, who occasionally make references to Israeli WMD in our discussions, are troubled by this double standard, not only as it pertains to U.S. calls for political and economic change, but to weapons proliferation as well.

¶18. (C) Comment: It is almost impossible to have a political discussion or hear a scholarly lecture on the Middle East without being reminded of the unfinished business concerning Israel and the Palestinian territories. Some believe the U.S. has been negligent, or too one-sided, and will suffer as a consequence. Others understand that there are multiple actors, including Arab states, who need to intervene. Either way, our interlocutors believe the

peace process needs to move forward to prevent further
alienation of Arabs and Muslims over the one
historical and emotional issue that unites them.
WAHBA